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DIONNE et al.

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It is respectfully requested that this application be given the benefit of the foreign filing date under the provisions of 35 U.S.C. §119 of the following, a certified copy of which is submitted herewith:

Application No.

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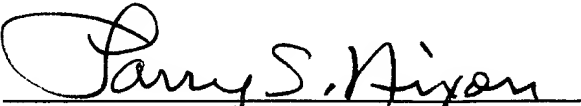
Filed

25 October 2000

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I also certify that subject to the payment of the prescribed renewal fees, the patent will remain in force for a period of twenty years from the date of the filing of the application.

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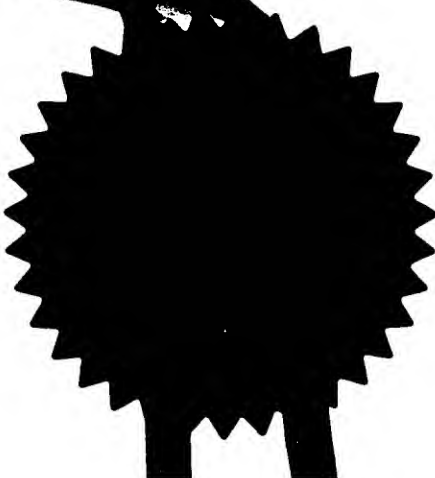
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12 August 2004



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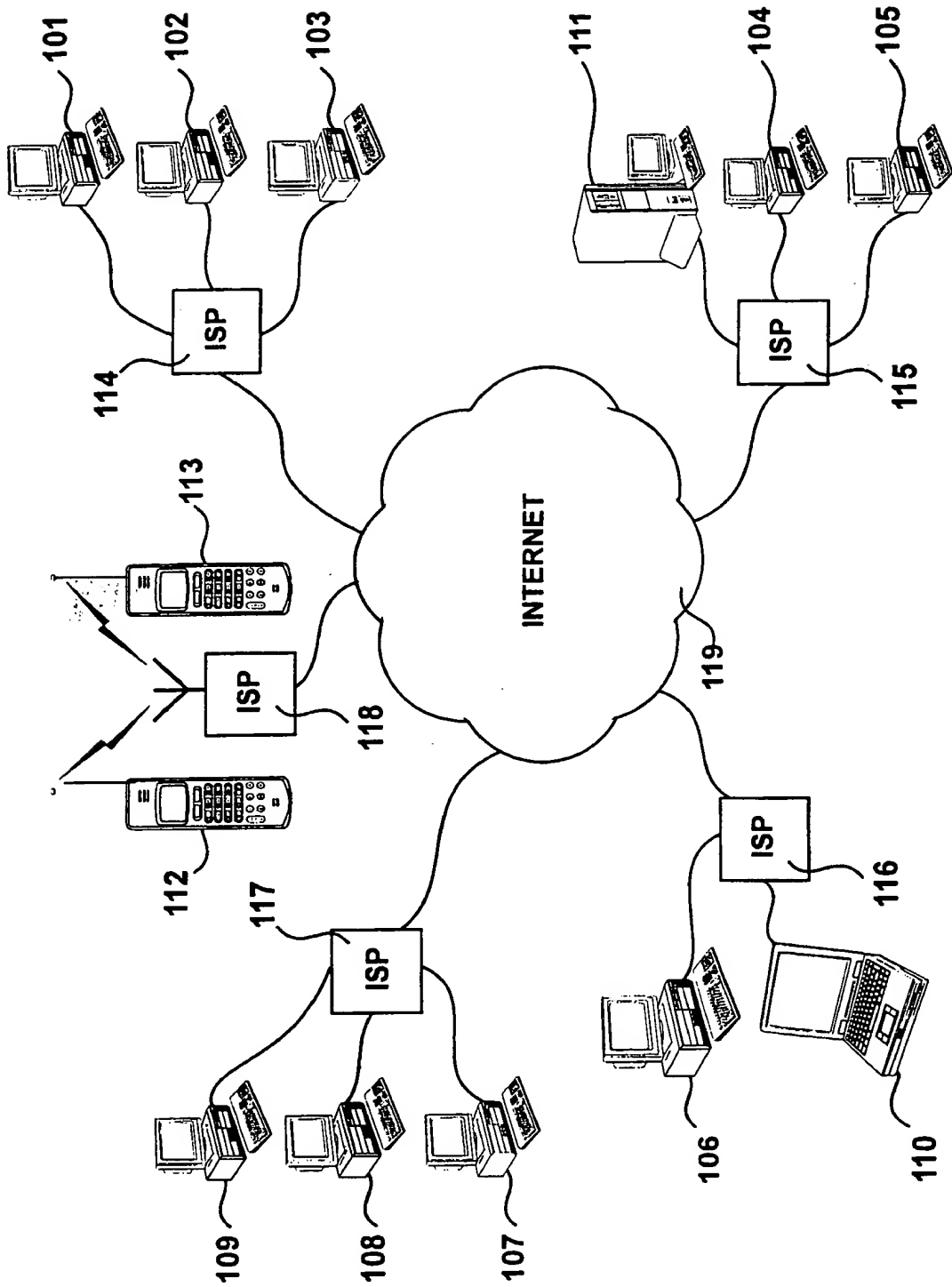
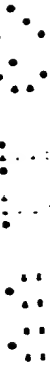


Figure 1



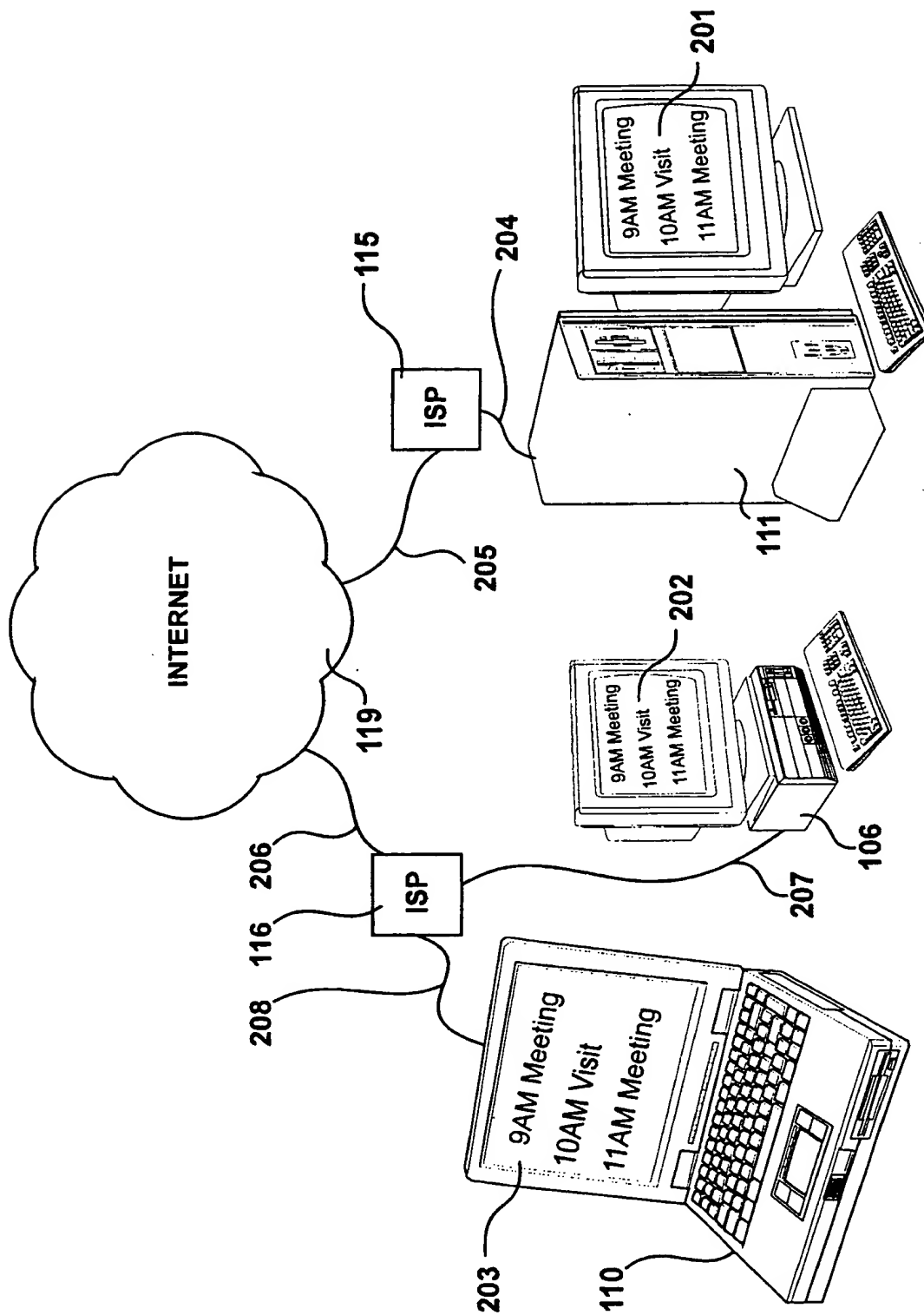
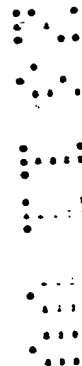


Figure 2



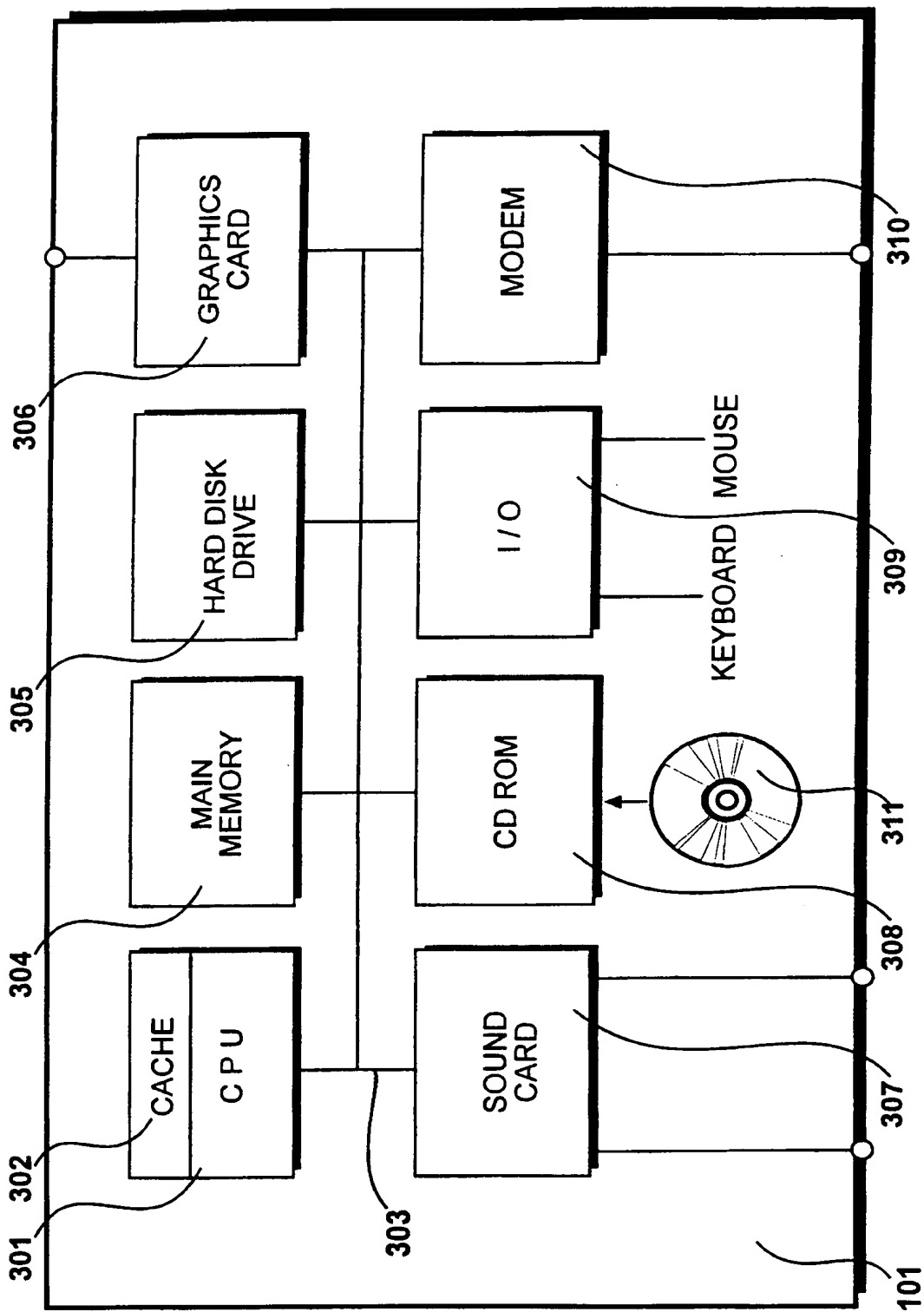
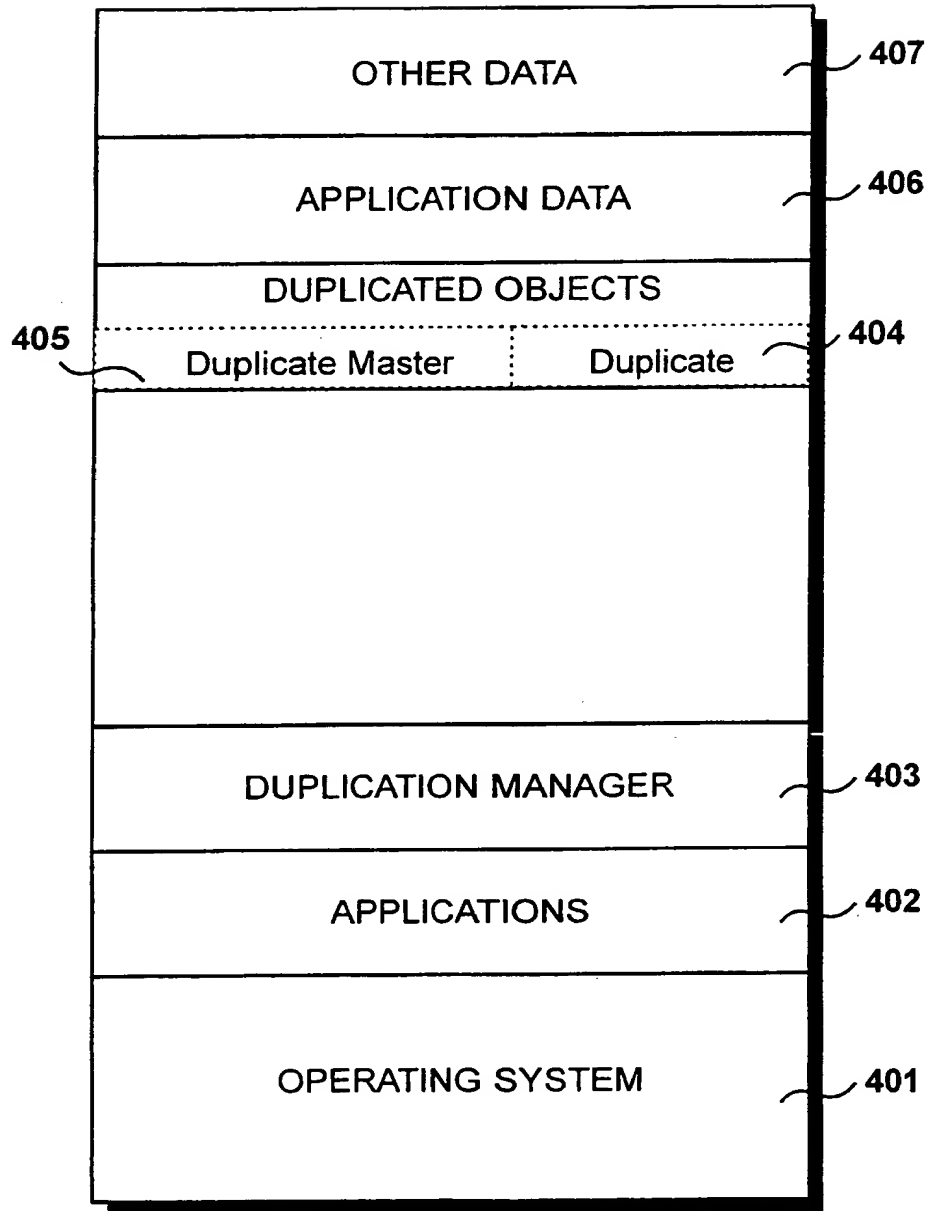


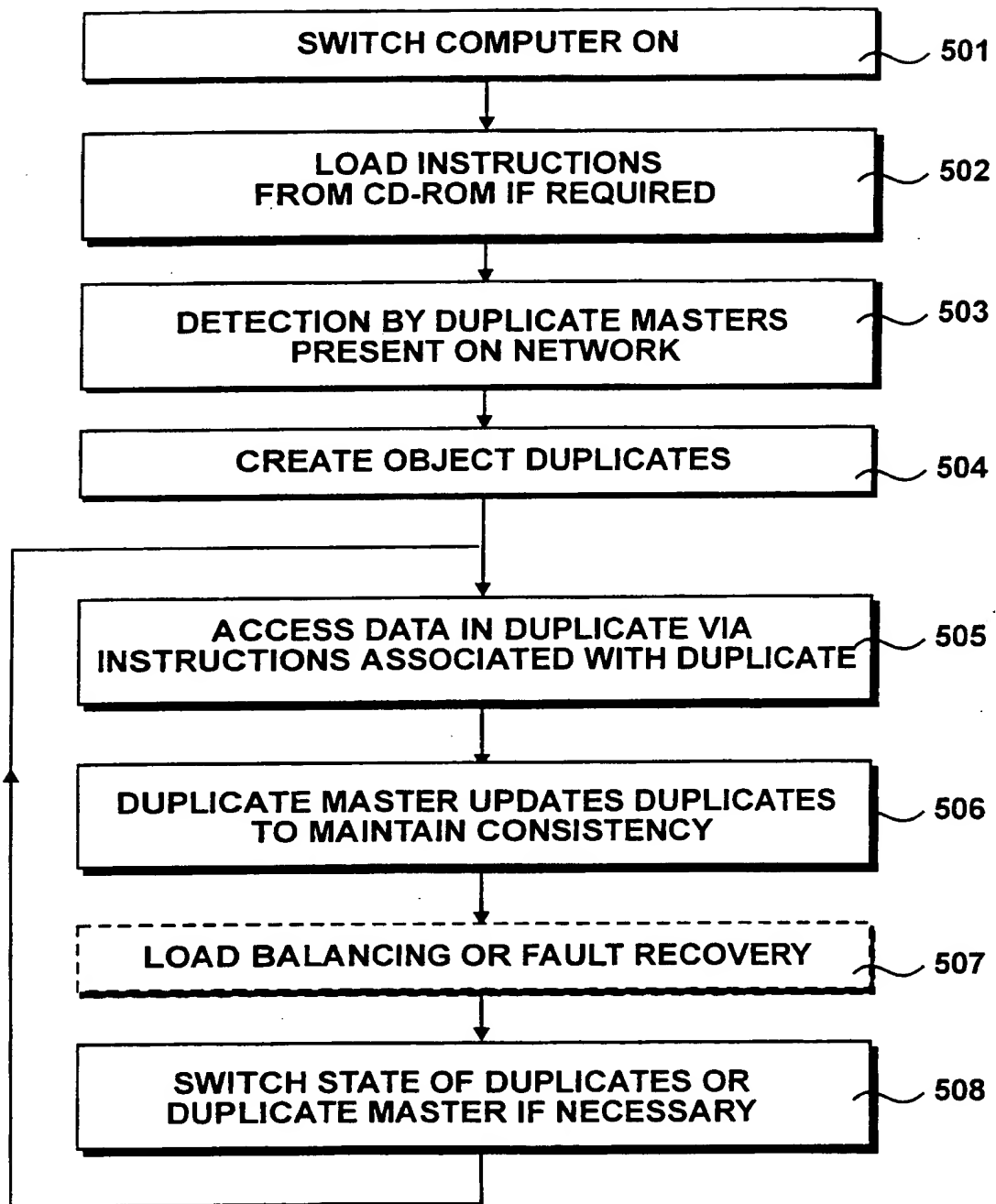
Figure 3

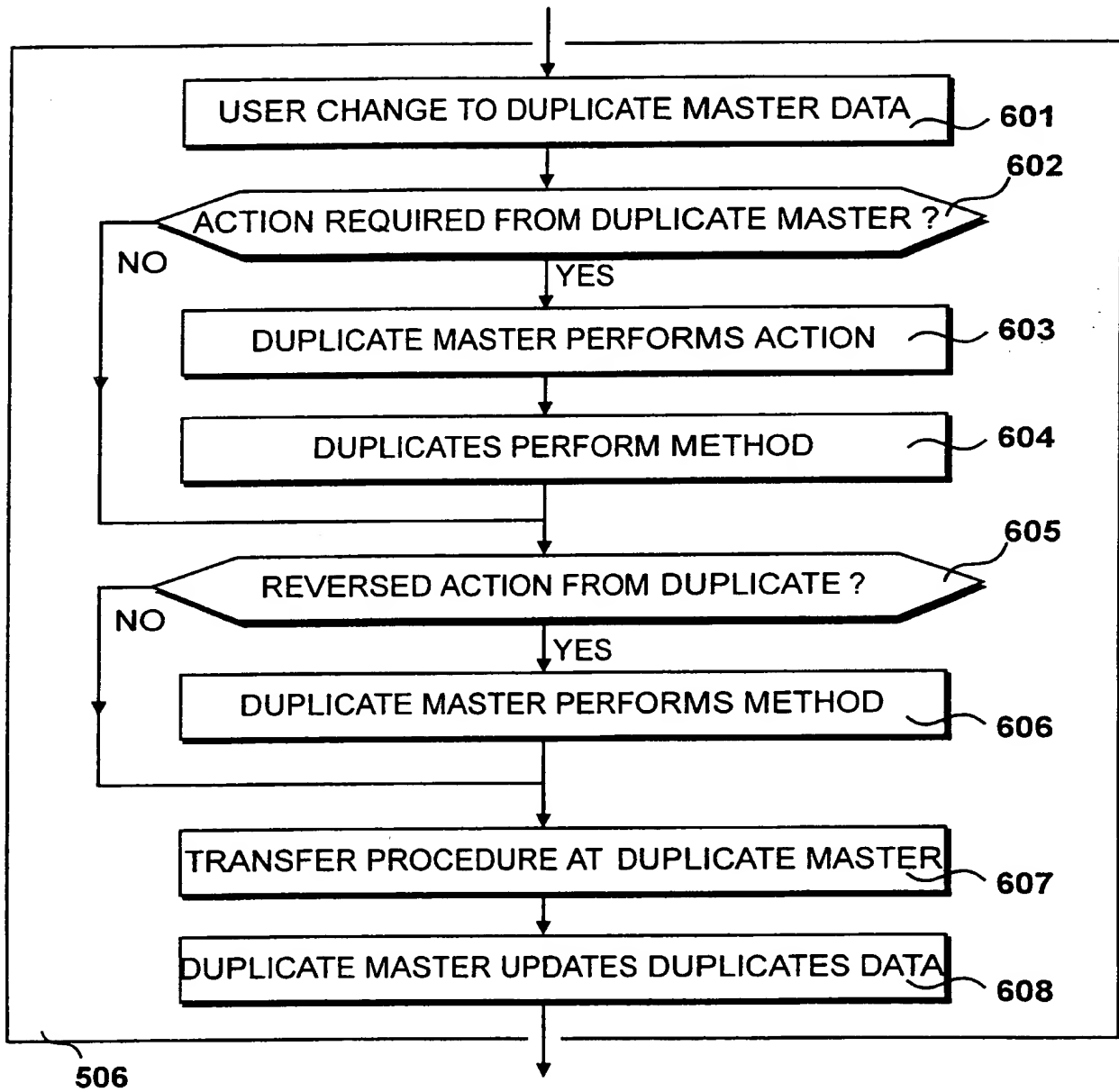
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*Figure 4*

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*Figure 5*

*Figure 6*

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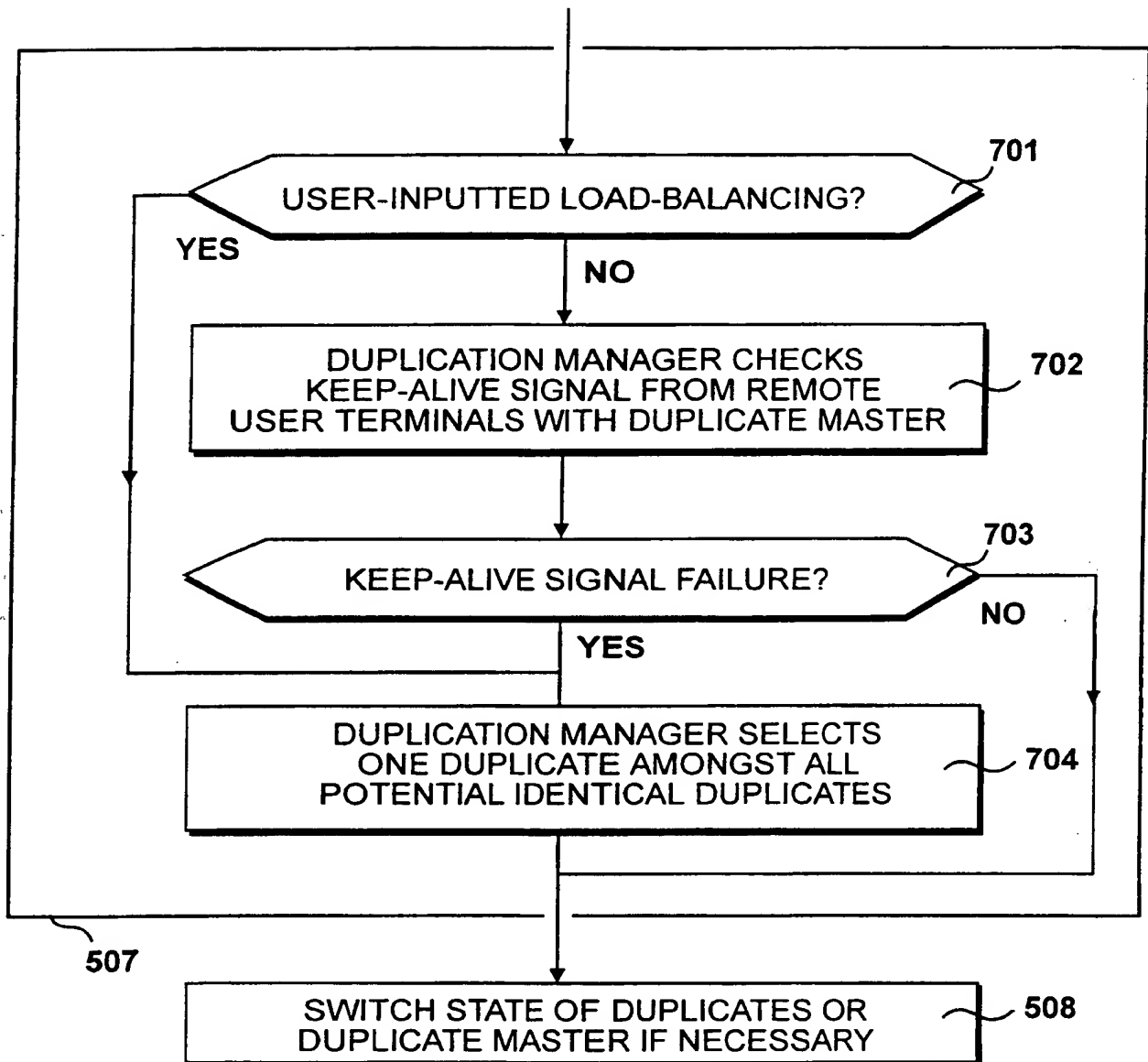


Figure 7

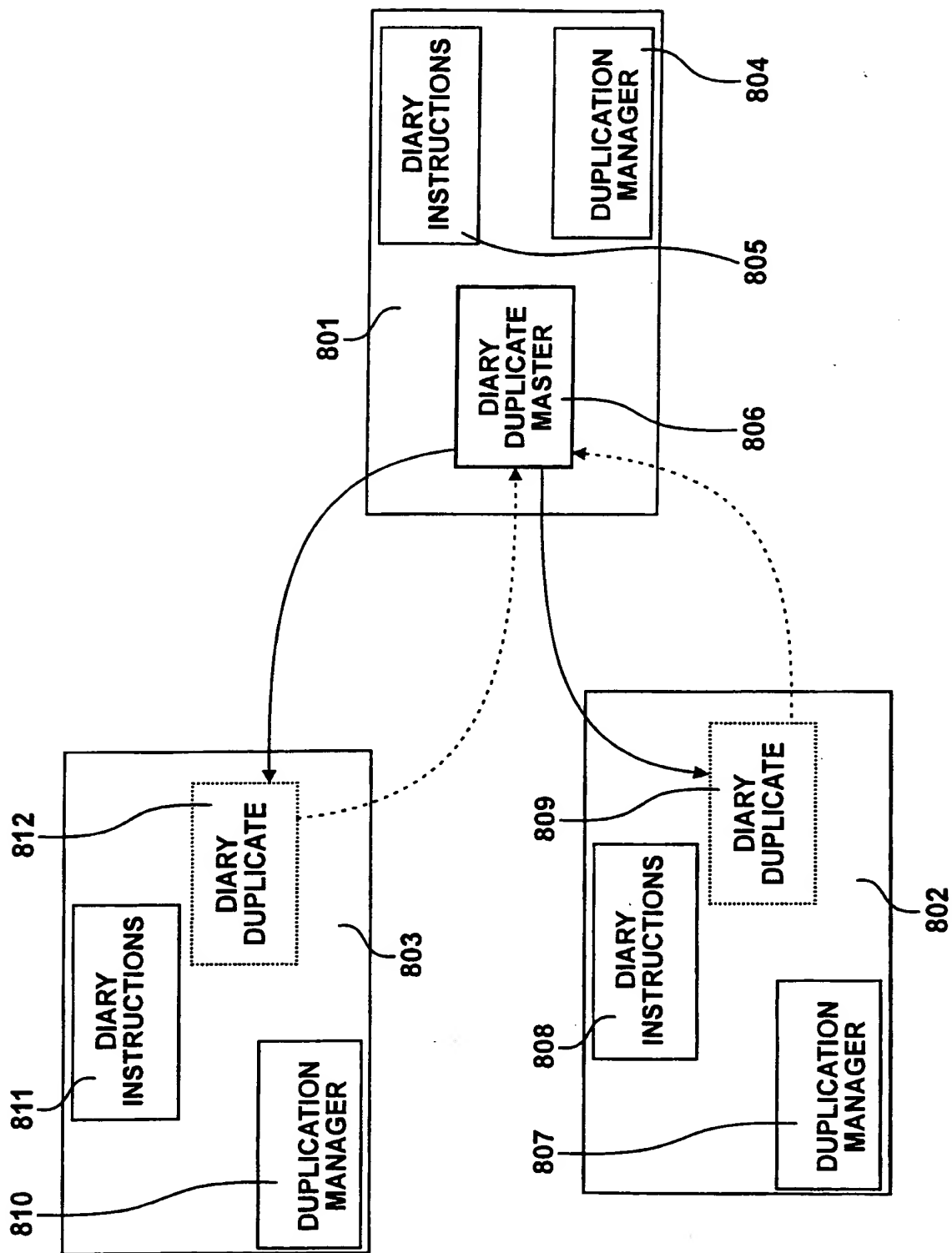


Figure 8

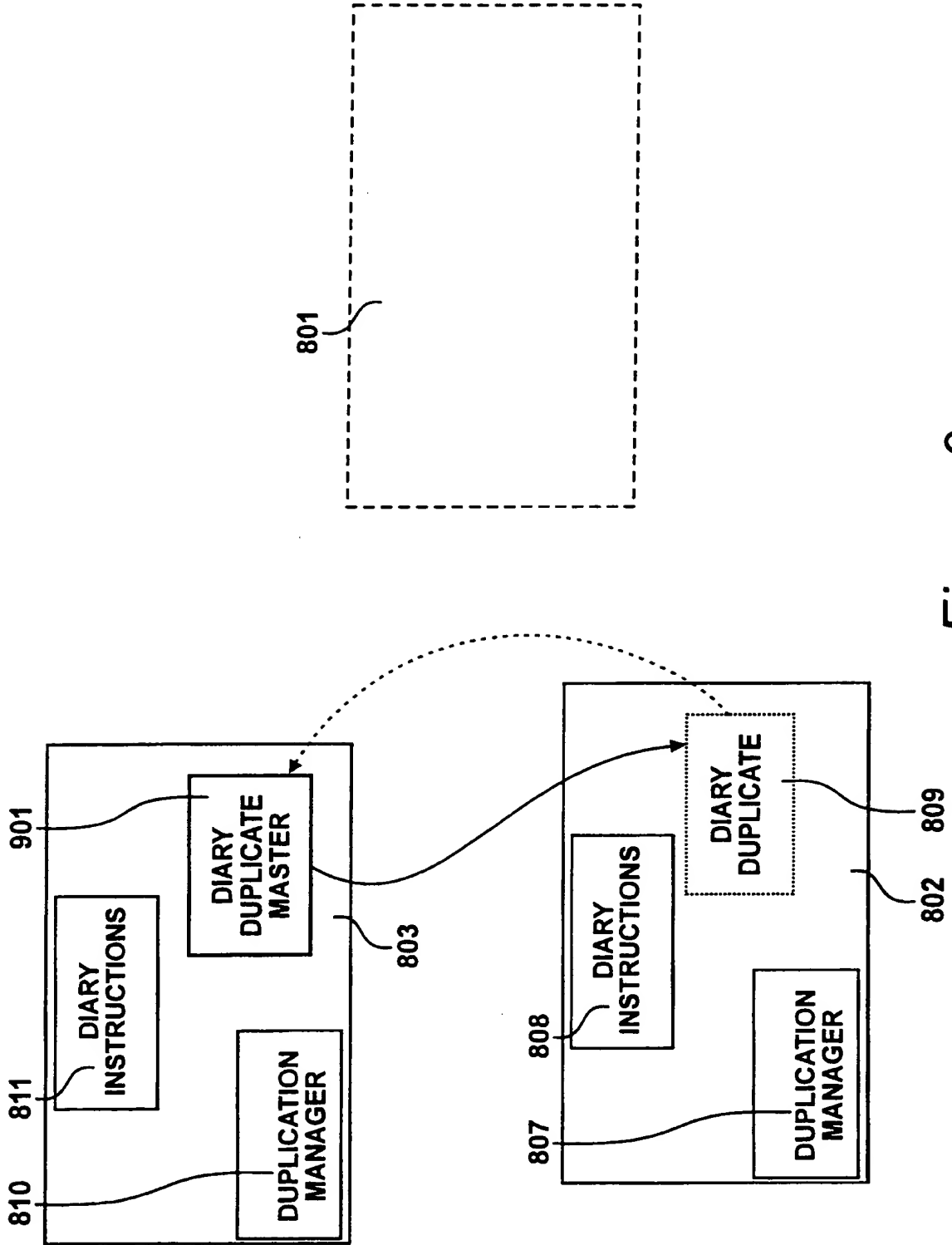


Figure 9

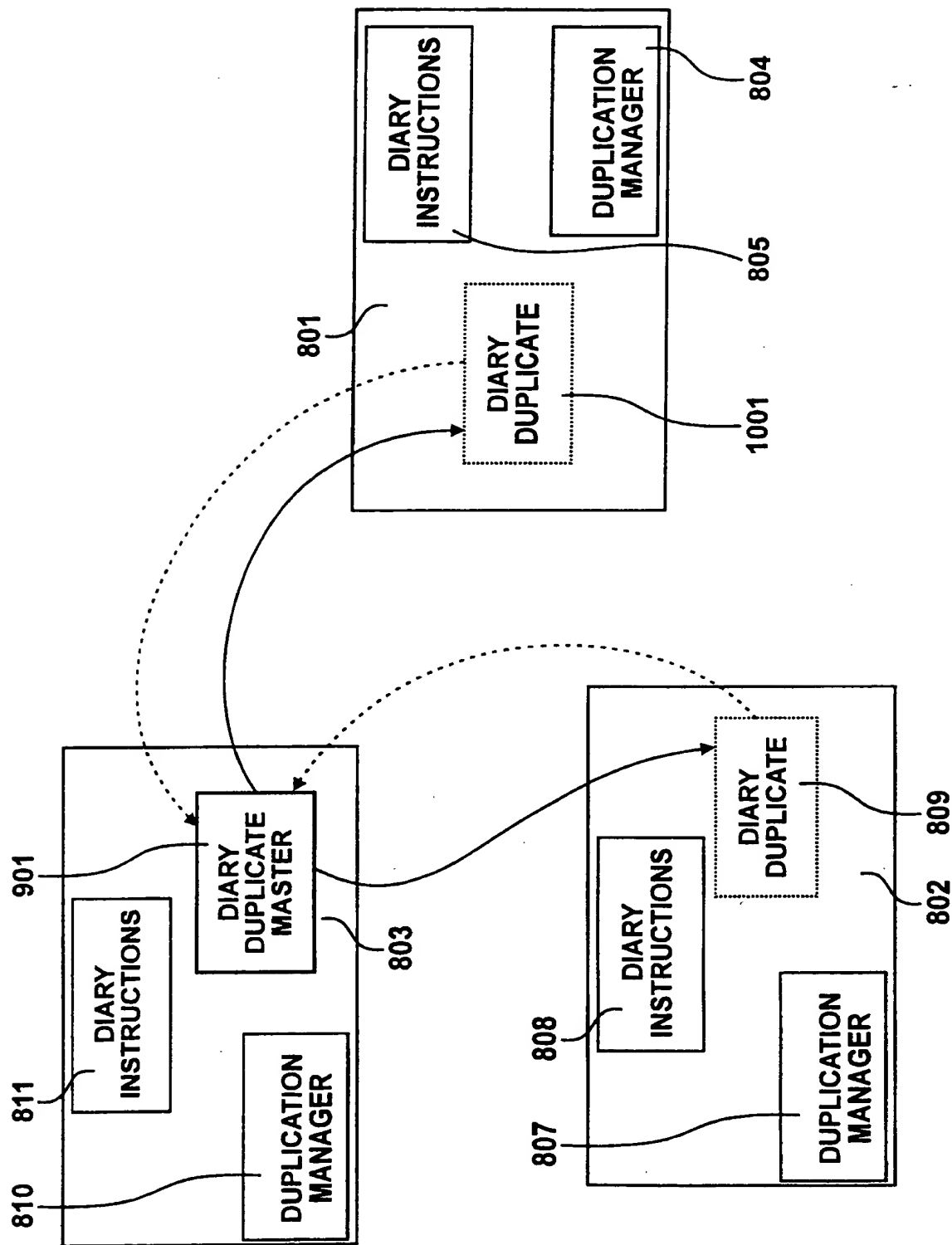


Figure 10

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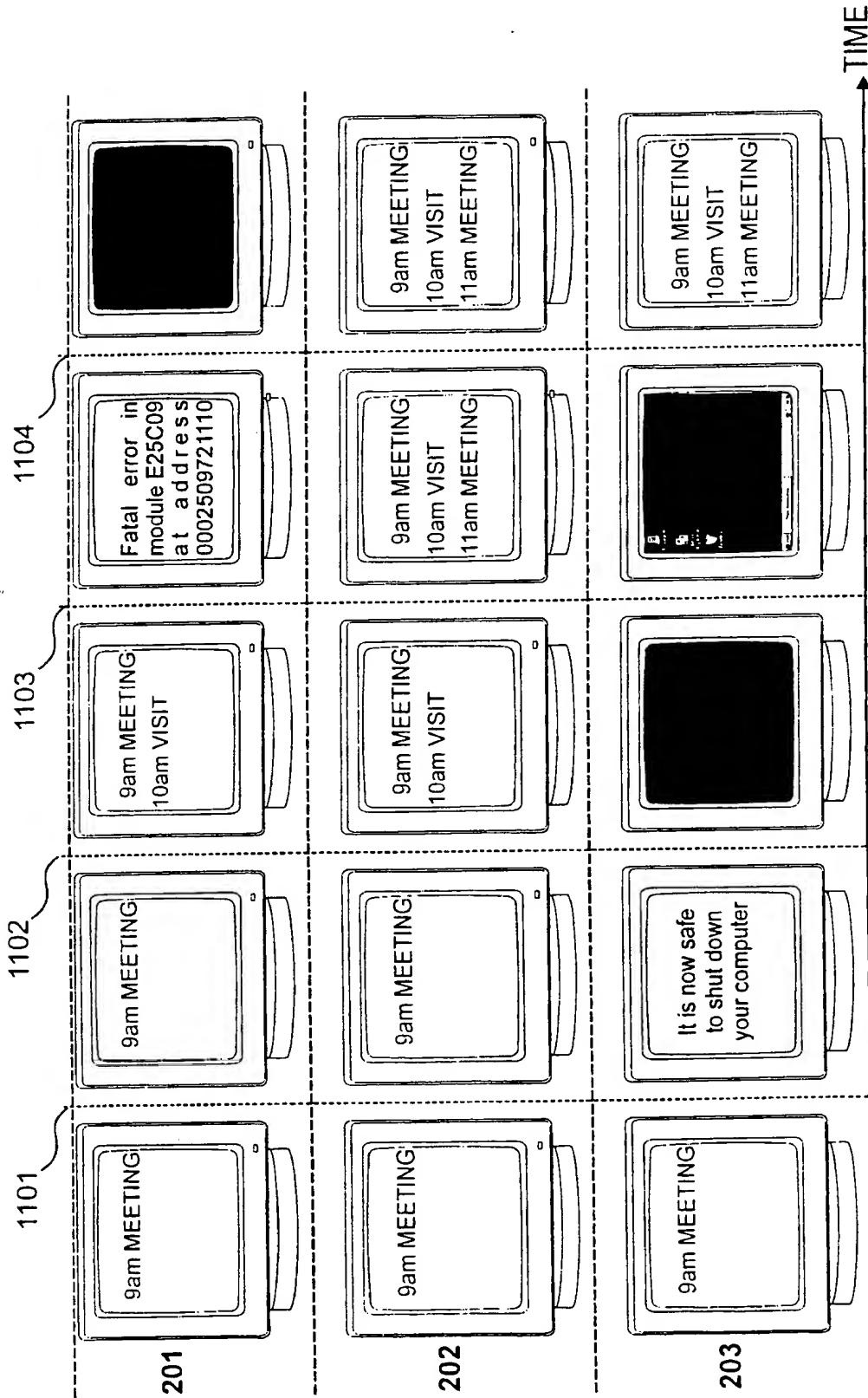


Figure 11

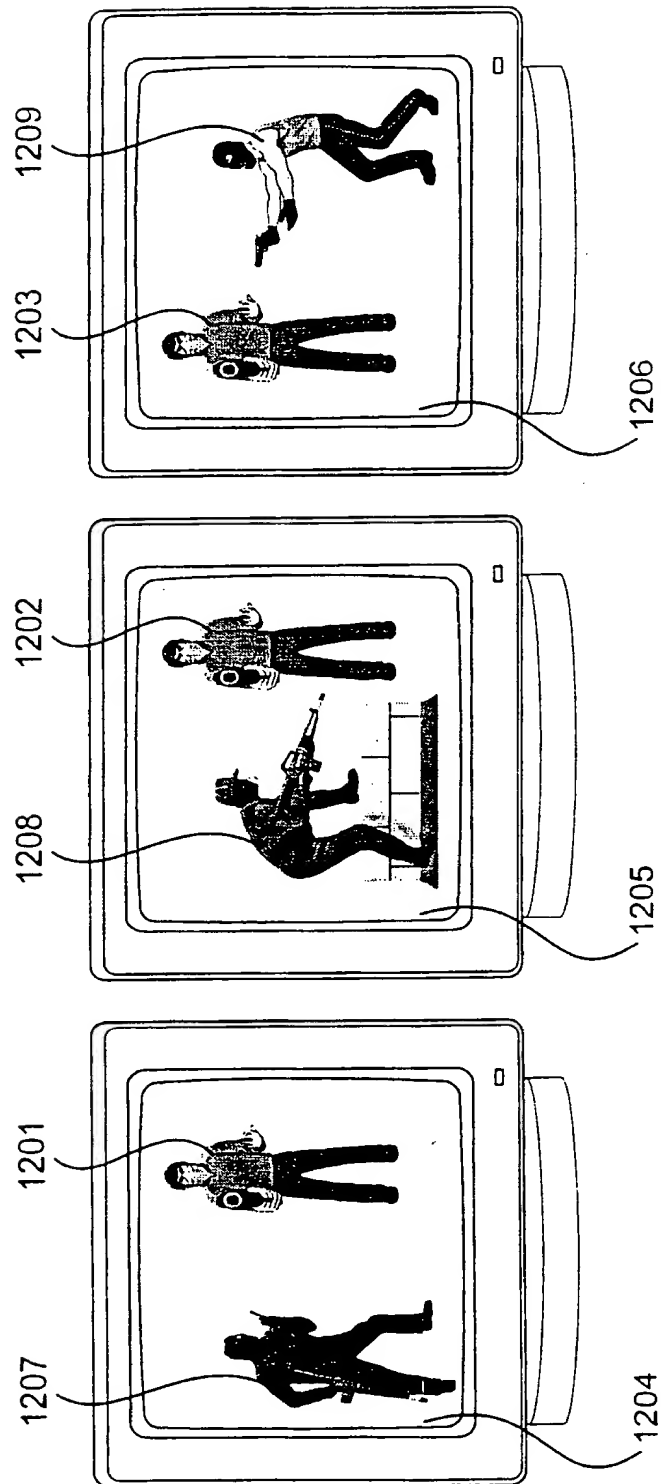


Figure 12

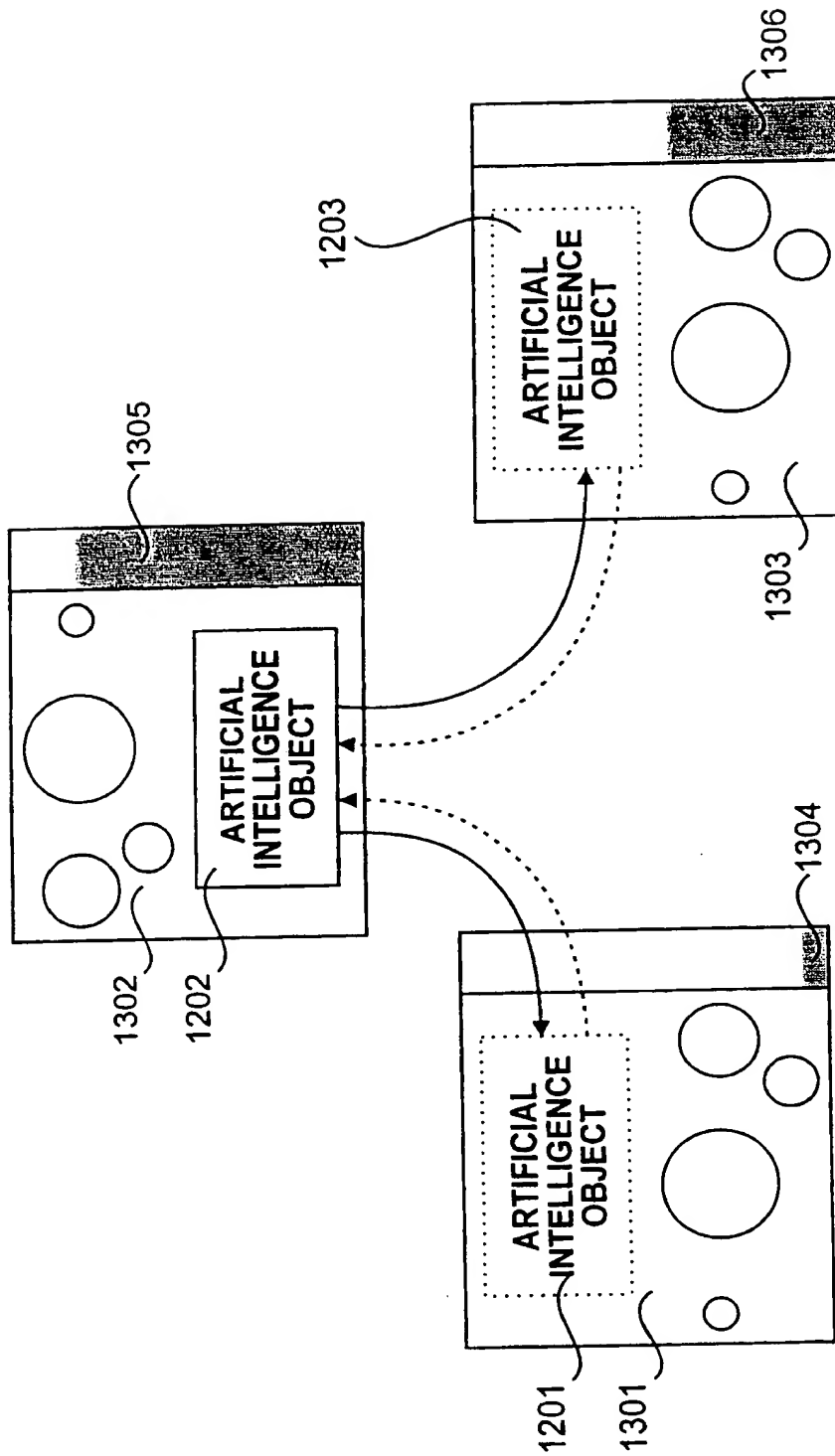


Figure 13

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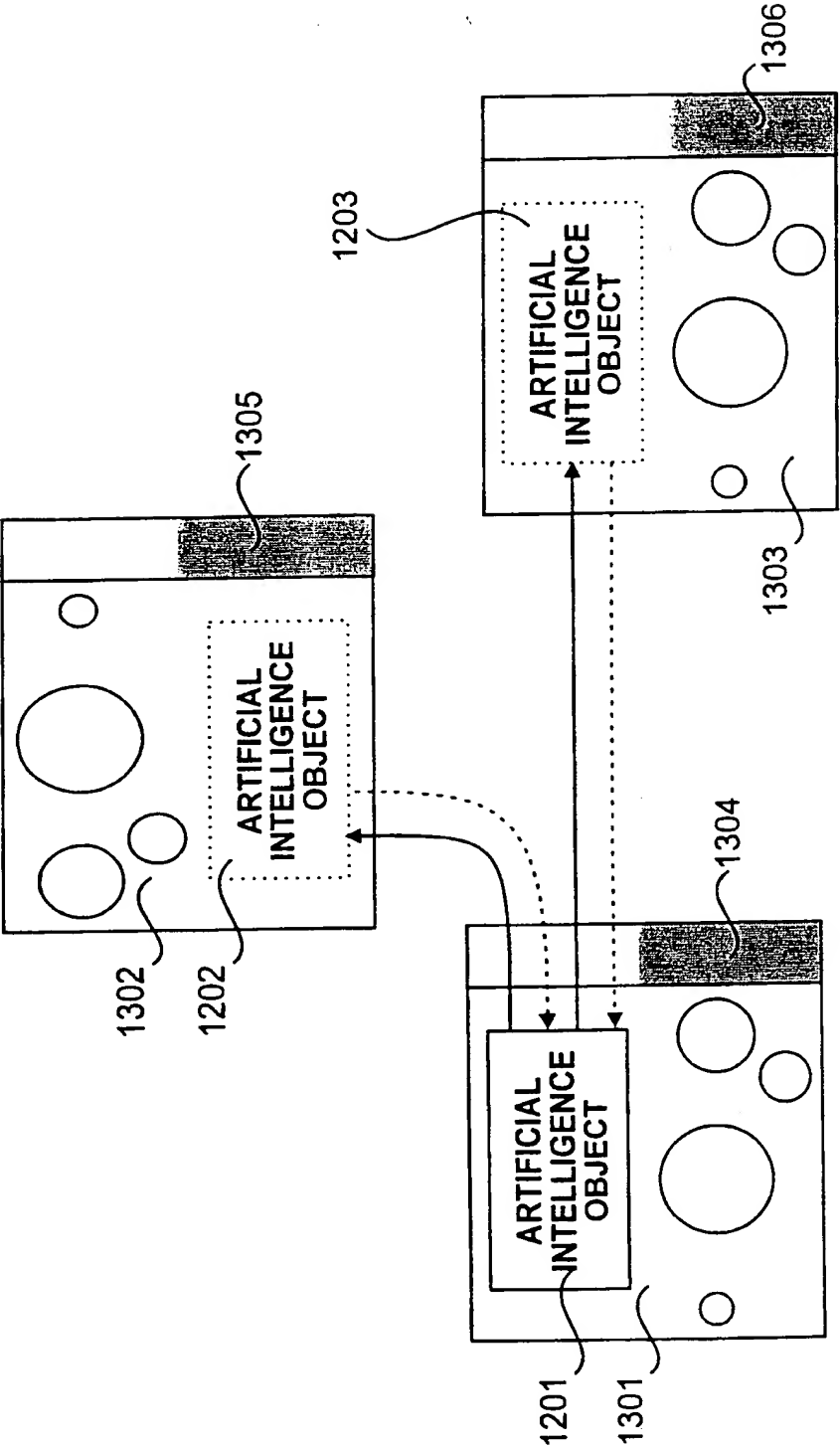


Figure 14

17 11 03
2 3 6 8 4 11

Sharing Data Over a Network

The present invention relates to a method of sharing data over a network, having a plurality of network connected terminals, each comprising memory means and processing means, said memory means including instructions for managing object duplication.

Data sharing applications for the distribution of and access to said data over LAN-type networks (Local Area Network) and, more recently, the Internet have been widely developed. Indeed, the very idea of networks is for networked users to be able to exchange data other than via external medium, for instance floppy disks. In a typical situation, a user accesses data located on a server, itself located either on a LAN or on the Internet, and locally peruses said data, which is shared over said LAN or the Internet by other users, be it for recreational or for professional use. However, this approach is invariably based on a method of sharing data over a network according to instructions for managing data or object distribution. In essence, a user accesses data which is not local, peruses said data locally, but said data or object remains located remotely. As a result, should the networked server or network computer become unavailable over said network, for instance if it experiences a malfunction and crashes, said data becomes immediately unavailable and the user loses any information or subsequent modifications to said data.

Sharing data over a network thus suffers from an inherent instability that may result in lost or corrupted data and information. The present state-of-the-art in data sharing over networks does not remedy this inherent instability other than by resorting to backing-up said data and, should a malfunction corrupt or erase said data, subsequently restoring said data from

said last known validated back-up. This last action usually requires manual or automated instructions, knowing that said automated instructions also have to be initially manually set-up.

5 According to the first aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of sharing data over a network, in which said network includes a plurality of network-connected terminals and each of said terminals has memory means and processing means, wherein said memory means stores duplication manager instructions for managing object duplication, comprising the steps of: responding to a data requirement of a first of said terminals by
10 duplicating an object from a second of said terminals at said first terminal; accessing data in said duplicated object using locally executed object instructions at said first terminal; and maintaining data consistency between duplicated objects by establishing a duplication master, wherein the role of said duplication master is switchable between said duplicates.

15 In a preferred embodiment, duplicate master switching is performed to effect load balancing over the network. In an alternative preferred embodiment, duplicate master switching is performed as a result of a fault recovery process.

20 Preferably, duplicates are updated by said duplicate master and in the preferred embodiment only one duplicate master exists for a group of duplicates.

The invention will now be described, with reference to the accompanying drawings, by way of example only, in which:

25 *Figure 1* illustrates a network environment, including user terminals, cell phones and servers sharing data over said network environment;

Figure 2 illustrates a detail of a network environment, wherein identical data is shared between three different terminals;

Figure 3 details hardware components of a user terminal of the type illustrated in *Figures 1* and *2*, including a memory;

Figure 4 details the contents of the memory shown in *Figure 3*, including a duplication manager and duplicated objects;

5 *Figure 5* summarises actions performed at a user terminal when logging onto a network;

Figure 6 summarises actions performed when updating duplicated objects to maintain consistency;

10 *Figure 7* summarises actions performed to decide whether to switch the state of a duplicate to a state of duplicate master if necessary;

Figure 8 illustrates interactions between a duplicate master and duplicates respectively located on three individual terminals;

15 *Figure 9* illustrates the interactions in *Figure 8*, wherein a terminal has been disabled and has become unavailable on the network and the state of the duplicate has been switched;

Figure 10 illustrates the interactions of *Figures 8* and *9*, wherein said disabled terminal is now back on the network, and subsequent duplicate interaction;

20 *Figure 11* illustrates the interactions featured in *Figures 8, 9* and *10* by way of a representation of the respective Graphical User Interface of the three distinct network terminals over a period of time;

Figure 12 illustrates the objects visible on the display means of three distinct networked terminals;

25 *Figure 13* illustrates the contents of the respective main memory of said three distinct networked terminals;

Figure 14 illustrates load balancing between said three distinct network terminals.

The invention will now be described by way of example only with reference to the previously identified drawings.

Data sharing applications distribute said data amongst multiple users using a network of connected computers. An environment for connecting multiple users to whom data will be distributed is illustrated in *Figure 1*. Computer terminals **101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109** and **110**, server **111**, internet-enabled mobile phones **112** and **113** are connected via internet service providers (ISP) **114, 115, 116, 117** and **118**, to the Internet **119**. The ISP's **114** to **118** in combination with user terminals **101** to **111**, provide each individual user with a unique IP address, e-mail account and other optional internet facilities such as are commonly provided to a user with an ISP account. Provided that appropriate data transfer applications, protocols and permissions have been set up, there is provided the scope for any which one of user terminals **101** to **110** to access data stored on server **111**.

In the example, user terminals **106** and **110** are connected to the Internet via ISP **116**. Upon performing requests to access data stored on server **111**, said requests from user terminals **106** and **110** transits via ISP **116** to ISP **115**, which in turn transmits said requests to server **111**.

Provided operators of user terminals **106** and **110** are allowed to access data stored on server **111**, server **111** will grant user terminals **106** and **110** access to its stored data. Sharing stored data is illustrated in *Figure 2*. Upon meeting all criteria for the successful establishment of a situation of sharing data, both user terminals **106**, **110** and the server **111** display identical data in a diary application.

According to the Prior Art, whereas display means **201** of server **111** displays diary information which is stored locally, display means **202** of user terminal **106** and both display means **203** of user terminal **110** display diary information which is stored remotely from them. Therefore, the diary information displayed by display means **202** and **203** is reliant upon server **111** being regularly updated with fresh new diary information and user terminals **106** and **110** performing regular requests for updates of said diary information. Thus, were server **111** to be disabled, whether due to foreseen circumstances such as regular maintenance or unforeseen circumstances such as a hardware fault, then regular requests for data updates, i.e. new diary information, from user terminals **106** and **110** would be unsuccessful and the diary information displayed on display means **202** and **203** would cease to be refreshed.

Moreover, whereas said server **111** may be kept operational at all times, connecting means **204** to **208**, or ISP **115** or **116** to become disabled due to foreseen or unforeseen circumstances, then said diary information would equally cease to be updated. In the case of server **111** having been temporarily disabled, upon re-establishing network connection with terminals **106** and **110**, the information displayed on display means **202** and **203** would revert back to the last known validated data back-up located on server **111**, irrespective of any modifications to the diary information that

may have been implemented on user terminal **106** or **110** whilst server **111** was disabled.

The present invention overcomes the above shortcomings in that it prescribes a method of sharing data over a network, having a plurality of network connected terminals, each comprising memory means and processing means, said memory means including instructions for managing object duplication, wherein in response to a data requirement of a first of said network terminals, an object is duplicated from a second of said network terminals at said first terminal and data is then accessed in said object using locally executed object instructions at said first terminal; a data consistency is maintained between duplicated object.

Therefore, according to the invention, diary information stored on server **111** is duplicated onto user terminals **106** and **110** as opposed to merely distributed, such that should server **111** become unavailable, diary information is now stored locally on each of user terminals **106** and **110**.

Hardware forming the main part of a user's computer terminal **106** is illustrated in *Figure 3*. A central processing unit **301** fetches and executes instructions and manipulates data. Frequently accessed instructions and data are stored in a high speed cache memory **302**. The central processing unit **301** is connected to a system bus **303**. This provides connectivity with a larger main memory **304**, which requires significantly more time to access than the cache **302**. The main memory **304** contains between sixty-four and one hundred and twenty-eight megabytes of dynamic random access memory. A hard disc drive (HDD) **305** provides non-volatile bulk storage of instructions and data. A graphics card **306** receives graphics data from the CPU **301**, along with graphics instructions. Preferably, the graphics card **306** includes substantial dedicated graphical processing capabilities, so that

the CPU **301** is not burdened with computationally intensive tasks for which it is not optimised. Similarly, a sound card **307** receives sound data from the CPU **301**, along with sound processing instructions.

5 Preferably, the sound card **307** includes substantial dedicated digital sound processing capabilities, so that the CPU **301** is not burdened with computationally intensive tasks for which it is not optimised. A CD-ROM reader **308** receives processing instructions and data from an external CD-ROM medium **311**. A serial bus interface **309** provides connectivity to peripherals such as a mouse and keyboard. A modem **310** provides
10 connectivity to the Internet via a telephone connection to the user's ISP **116**. The equipment shown in *Figure 3* constitutes a personal computer of fairly standard type, such as a PC or Mac, whether used as a network terminal or as a network server.

The contents of the memory **304** of the user's personal computer
15 **106** shown in *Figure 3* are summarised in *Figure 4*. An operating system, including a basic BIOS is shown at **401**. This provides common functionality shared between all applications operating on the computer **106**, such as disk drive access, file handling and window-based graphical user
interfacing. Applications **402** include instructions for an Internet browser, a
20 file browser and other items, that are usually present but inactive on the user's graphical desktop.

Duplication manager instructions **403** comprise the program steps required by the CPU **301** to act upon duplicated objects, the type of which comprise either a duplicate **404** or duplicate master **405**.

25 The Duplication Manager is responsible for allocating the portion of main memory necessary to the successful establishment of duplicated objects and for servicing said duplicated objects throughout their life-cycle.

The Duplication Manager **403** also monitors the machines from which it receives data from remote duplicate masters using keep-alive procedures. For instance, in the case of a communication failure, the duplication manager ensures that only one duplicate will take over the responsibility of duplicate master. Similarly, in the case of a new user terminal connecting to the network, the Duplication Manager detects said connection and inform the Duplicate Master **405** to take appropriate subsequent action.

Finally, outside the context of a fault-induced triggering event as described above, the load-balancing task of the Duplication Manager can also be performed automatically, the result of which is also to switch the state of a duplicate to the state of duplicate master and toggle the state of the previous duplicate master to the state of duplicate.

The Duplicated objects can be either Duplicate **404** or Duplicate Master **405**. They provide object duplication functionality and include dynamic elements, such as attributes and methods, with methods performing attributes processing. Duplicated objects have the ability to execute local methods and access local attributes.

Upon being informed by the Duplication Manager of a new user terminal that said new user terminal has connected to the network, the Duplication Manager in charge of the Duplicate Master determines whether applications running on said new user terminal require a duplicate and, subsequently, the Duplication Manager of said new user terminal creates a local duplicate and the duplicate master provides the most recent data or object to said duplicate in the main memory of said new user terminal, so that said the duplicate can operate in synchronicity with the Duplicate Master.

A Duplicate Master **405** contains generic or application-specific data,

which requires sharing over a network in synchronicity with its duplicates. It acts as a co-ordinator between a shared application and its duplicates, such that changes on the Duplicate Master are propagated to its duplicates, in order to preserve system integrity. As apex co-ordinator, the Duplicate Master is equipped with a mechanism allowing it to trigger a locally-executed method on all remote duplicates, called an action.

A Duplicate **404** is structured with potentially the same functionality as a Duplicate Master, but initially only maintains information for local data access and performs methods for local processing. As dependent from the Duplicate master, the Duplicate is equipped with a mechanism allowing it to trigger a locally-executed method on the duplicate master, called reversed action. For instance, should a duplicate require a change in the data it contains in answer to an application command, it will trigger a reversed action and obtain updated information from the duplicate master.

The duplication manager **403** shown in the computer's memory in *Figure 4* is detailed in *Figure 5*.

Upon activation of a user's terminal at step **501**, the instructions necessary for the duplication manager **403** to carry out its local functions may need to be loaded from an external medium, such as a CD ROM, at step **502**.

As the user's terminal connects to the network and the duplication manager application is launched locally, it is simultaneously detected by all remote duplication managers currently connected to the same network group as said user terminal at step **503**.

A remote duplicate master **405** comprising data and methods then creates a local duplicate in the main memory of the local user terminal from its current set of information available at step **504**.

Any local application can now access data in the duplicate locally and process said data locally via the instructions associated with the duplicate at step 505.

5 The duplicate master **405** ensures that the duplicate **404** is regularly updated in order to achieve and maintain data consistency at step 506.

10 If the main memory of the user terminal stores the duplicate master **405**, as opposed to duplicate **404**, the total processing activity load placed upon the CPU may exceed a delimited amount necessary for the fluid operation of the applications, including the duplication manager, stored in its memory. As said fluid operation is graphically represented by the application within the Graphical User Interface by a performance indicator, the user can ascertain whether they need to perform a load balancing instruction at step 507, in order to alleviate said load placed upon said CPU.

15 In this instance, the duplicate master **405** therefore switches the state of a remote duplicate to the state of a duplicate master, in effect delegating its Master status to said remote duplicate, in order to balance the resource load generated by the duplication manager and duplicate master between the local and remote sets of user terminal CPU resources.

20 Alternatively, if the main memory of the user terminal stores the duplicate **404**, said duplicate **404** becomes the duplicate master **405** transparently, i.e. the user can choose to remain unaware of the state change of the duplicate stored in the main memory of the user terminal they operate.

25 If the main memory of the user terminal which stores the duplicate master **405** becomes unavailable on the network, i.e. if the keep-alive procedures are breached by loss of connectivity, then the duplication

manager performs fault recovery at step 508.

The duplication manager therefore elects only one duplicate to become the Duplicate Master and then switches the state of this remote duplicate to the state of a duplicate master, ensuring that a single duplicate amongst all duplicates present on a network takes over the responsibility of sharing and updating the data.

As at step 507, the user remains unaware of the state change of the duplicate stored in the main memory of the user terminal they operate.

An update to maintain data consistency, such as occurring at step 506, is summarised in *Figure 6*.

At step 601 the duplicate master 405 ascertains any change to the data based on a user-inputted application command, such as would occur if, in the example, additional diary information needed implementing, such as a new meeting or appointment.

At step 602, the duplicate master 405 ascertains whether the user-inputted application command, which generated the data change at step 601, includes the subsequent requirement of an action to be performed by said duplicate master. If said action is not required, then the procedure moves forward to step 605. Alternatively, should said action be required, the duplicate master 405 performs said action, which translates as the requirement for all duplicates derived from said duplicate master to perform a method.

At step 604, said method is subsequently performed by all the duplicates derived from duplicate master, which are present on a common network group.

At step 605, the duplicate master 405 ascertains whether a duplicate has performed a reversed action. Should said reversed action be issued

from a duplicate, then the duplicate master **405** performs the related method at step **606**. In the example, said reversed action from said duplicate may take the form of an exclamation mark set against a particular diary entry, in order to outline its importance within a particular set of diary entries. The duplicate master will then implement said exclamation mark in all the diary duplicates it is currently in charge of.

Upon completing the data change validation procedure outlined in steps **601** to **606**, the duplicate master **405** then initiates the data update procedure at step **607**, i.e. it establishes a simultaneous link to all duplicates it is currently in charge of on a common network group. Upon successfully establishing said procedure the duplicate master **405** can then update all the duplicates at step **608**.

Thus, the duplicate master ensures that all duplicates are consistently updated with a common set of data, i.e. an identical set of diary entries.

The duplicate master subsequently establishes data transfer procedures at step **607**, in order to successfully update the duplicates at step **608**.

Upon completing the data update procedure illustrated in *Figure 6*, a load-balancing task can be performed by the duplication manager **403** and initiated either by the user in case of CPU resource overload or automatically in case of a network fault, where it can be considered as a fault recovery task. Such a load-balancing task is summarised in *Figure 7*. When performing a load balancing task, the duplication manager in effect switches the state of a duplicate to the state of a duplicate master if necessary, and subsequently switches the state of the previous duplicate master to the state of a duplicate.

At step 701, the duplication manager 403 first determines if the user has inputted a command to perform load balancing, as he would be prompted to do by the visual representation, by way of a performance indicator, of an overload of the terminal CPU in the Graphical User Interface, in order to alleviate said overload placed upon said CPU. If such a command is received, then the procedure immediately moves forward to step 704.

Alternatively, the duplication manager carries out its next duplicate servicing task. In order for the remote duplicate master 405 to successfully share and update its duplicates, the duplication manager 403 must ensure that there exists connectivity to the duplicate master at each cycle, at step 702.

Should said connectivity be lost and the duplicate master is pronounced unavailable at step 703, then at step 704 the duplication manager 403 will next ascertain which duplicate is the most suitable duplicate to become duplicate master, i.e. the most up-to-date. Should a local duplicate be identified as said most suitable duplicate then the duplication manager will switch the state of said local duplicate to that of duplicate master at step 705. Alternatively, should a remote duplication manager first identify its respective duplicate as said most suitable duplicate at step 704, then said remote duplication manager will inform the local duplication manager that a new duplicate master 405 exists on the network and the remote duplication master will establish synchronicity with the local duplicate.

In the example, part of the contents of the main memory of three distinct networked-user terminals connected to a common network group are respectively illustrated in *Figure 8*. Main memory 801 stores a

duplication manager **804**, diary instructions **805** and the diary duplicate master **806**. The diary duplicate master comprise diary information. Main memory **802** stores a duplication manager **807**, diary instructions **808** and a diary duplicate **809**, which shares diary information with diary duplicate master **806**. Main memory **803** stores a duplication manager **810**, diary instructions **811** and a diary duplicate **812**, which also share diary information with diary duplicate master **806**. Diary duplicate master **806** forwards diary information updates to both diary duplicates **809**, **812**.

In *Figure 9* however, main memory **801** is now disabled, i.e. not available for sharing data over the network, due to any possible circumstance, such as the user terminal being voluntarily or involuntarily switched off, the ISP becoming unavailable or connecting means being faulty. At step **703**, duplication managers **807** and **810** have ascertained that the duplicate master is not available anymore and, following step **704**, duplication manager **807** determines that duplicate **812** is better suited to become duplicate master than its own duplicate **809**. For instance, duplicate **812** was last updated before duplicate **809** by the now defunct duplicate master **806**.

Consequently, the state of duplicate master **812** is switched to the state of diary duplicate master **901**. Duplication manager **810** and diary instructions **811** remain unchanged. Diary duplicate master **901** now updates the diary information of diary duplicate **809**.

In *Figure 10*, upon rejoining the network group onto which the respective user terminals corresponding to main memory **802** and main memory **803** are logged to, main memory **801** again stores a duplication manager **804** diary instructions **806** and a diary duplicate **1001**. Said diary duplicate **1001** is a duplicate of diary duplicate master **901** and,

consequently, diary duplicate **1001** contains all the updates that have taken place between diary duplicate master **901** and diary duplicate **809** that have taken place whilst the user terminal main memory **801** is part of was disconnected from the network. Duplication manager **804**, diary instructions **805** and diary duplicate **1001** resume operation in an identical fashion to duplication manager **807**, diary instructions **808** and diary duplicate **809** of main memory **802**. Diary duplicate master **901** stored in main memory **803** updates both the diary duplicate **809** and **1001** with diary information.

Figure 11 graphically illustrates the above interactions, by way of observing the display means **201**, **202** and **203** of user terminals **111**, **106** and **110** respectively, over a period of time. Prior to event **1101**, display means **201**, **202** and **203** display the graphical user interface of a diary application. For each of display means **201**, **202** and **203**, part of the main memory of their respective user terminal **111**, **106** and **110** each include a duplication manager, diary instructions and a diary duplicate. In the example, the diary duplicate master is part of the main memory associated with display means **203**.

At event **1101**, the user terminal **110** is conventionally switched off for the purpose of hardware maintenance. The operating system of user terminal **110** is preferably Windows 98. Part of the standard procedure for user terminal shutting according to this known application involves sequentially shutting down all the applications running in the main memory of the user terminal.

Upon closing all applications, a standard message is displayed, which informs the user that they may now switch the user terminal off at the mains. Upon shutting down user terminal **110**, the duplication managers respectively stored in the main memory of user terminal **106** and **111**

determine that duplicate master is not available anymore, as at step 703. The duplication manager stored in the main memory associated with display means 201 determines that the diary duplicate stored in said main memory is best suited to have its state switched. The diary duplicate stored
5 in the main memory associated with display means 201 therefore becomes the diary duplicate master. Display means 201 and 202 display the same data in their respective graphical user interface.

At event 1102, a new diary entry is inputted in the user terminal 111 associated with display means 201. Accordingly, the duplication manager
10 resident in the main memory associated with display means 202 updates the diary information of diary duplicate stored in said memory. Thus, the user at the user terminal 106 associated with display means 202 is now aware that a visit is scheduled at 10.00 am. However, the user terminal 110 is currently shut down.

15 At event 1103, a malfunction has occurred at user terminal 111. User terminal 111 preferably uses Windows NT4 as an operating system. A standard procedure of said operating system is to inform the user, in the case of an application corruption, where said corruption occurred in the terminal's main memory before closing the operating system down. In such
20 occurrences, a common procedure is to switch the user's terminal off at the mains. In the example, the duplication manager, diary instructions and diary duplicate master stored in the main memory of the user terminal 111 associated with display means 201 are now unavailable over the network. The duplication manager stored in the main memory of the user terminal
25 106 associated with display 202 has determined that said diary duplicate master is now unavailable and has subsequently switched the state of its diary duplicate to the state of diary duplicate master, as user terminal 110

has been switched on again and is shown as loading duplication manager application and diary instructions from CD ROM.

At event **1104**, said user terminal **110** has completed loading said duplication manager applications and diary instructions and, according to steps **503** and **504**, has created a diary duplicate from the diary duplicate master stored in the main memory of user terminal **106** associated with display means **202**.

The diary duplicate stored in the main memory of user terminal **110** has been updated with the diary entry which occurred between event **1102** and **1103**, whilst said user terminal **110** was switched off. Said diary duplicate has also been updated with the diary entry implemented between event **1103** and **1104**, when said user terminal **110** was still only loading instructions from an external medium. The user of user terminal **110** is fully appraised of two new diary entries, which were implemented whilst the user's terminal was not connected to the network.

Should the user of user terminal **111** successfully rejoin the network group that user terminals **106** and **110** are logged onto, the duplication manager stored in the user's main memory will create a diary duplicate from diary duplicate master stored in the main memory of user terminal **106**, just as the duplication manager stored in the main memory of user terminal **110** created a diary duplicate of said diary duplicate master. The user of user terminal **111**, associated with display means **201**, will then be fully appraised of any subsequent diary entries implemented at user terminal **106** or **110**.

Whereas a diary application is suitable to illustrate the tasks of maintaining and updating duplicated objects according to the invention, such an application is not traditionally resource-intensive in terms of

processing requirements. In order to better illustrate the task of load balancing such as detailed at step 507 in *Figure 5* and steps 701 to 708 in *Figure 7*, a game application for recreational use is more appropriate.

5 Game applications are traditionally very resource-intensive in terms of processing requirements and take full advantage of devices such as graphics card 306, sound card 307 and, in the case of LAN or Internet play, modem 310. Moreover, in the case of game applications where game rules include CPU-controlled opposition, artificial intelligence applications are implemented and stored in the main memory of a user's terminal in order to
10 provide said CPU-controlled opposition with intelligent behaviour. According to the known art, such artificial intelligence applications are traditionally the most resource-intensive applications stored in a user's terminal main memory.

Such a game application, including CPU-controlled opponents governed by an artificial intelligence application, is illustrated in *Figure 12*.
15 Avatars 1201, 1202 and 1203 represent an identical, single CPU-controlled opponent, which is separately viewed on display means 1204, 1205 and 1206. In the game, which takes place over a network, an avatar 1207... represents the player who operates the user terminal corresponding to display means 1204. Similarly, an avatar 1208 and an avatar 1209
20 respectively represents the player operating the user terminal corresponding to display means 1205 and the player operating user terminal corresponding to display means 1206. As the avatars 1201, 1202 and 1203 are a representation of a single CPU-generated artificial intelligence object shared over a network by three distinct user terminals,
25 the attributes and data of said artificial intelligence object are duplicated onto the main memory of the respective user terminals of said players,

where avatar **1202**, i.e. artificial intelligence object **1202**, is the duplicate master in the example.

Figure 13 provides a graphical representation of the main memory **1301**, **1302** and **1303** of the user terminals respectively associated with display means **1204**, **1205** and **1206**. Each of said main memories **1301**, **1302** and **1303** includes an operating system, applications, a duplication manager, game data and duplicated objects **1201**, **1202** and **1203** respectively. Artificial intelligence object **1202** is the duplicate master and artificial intelligence objects **1201** and **1203** are duplicates; said duplicate master and duplicates interact according to the sequence of tasks represented in *Figures 5, 6 and 7*.

In addition to the representation of the main memories **1301**, **1302** and **1303** of said distinct user terminals, resource load tolerance gauges **1304**, **1305** and **1306** graphically represent the resource load placed upon the respective central processing units of said user terminals. As artificial intelligence object **1202** is the duplicate master, it therefore updates and maintains artificial intelligence objects **1201** and **1203**. As the attributes and data processing of said artificial intelligence object are resource-intensive, the resource load tolerance gauge **1305** accordingly illustrates a CPU-usage level of approximately seventy-five percent. Resource load tolerance gauges **1304** and **1306**, respectively illustrate a CPU-usage level of approximately ten percent and approximately fifty percent, as artificial intelligence objects **1201** and **1203** are simple duplicates.

Upon being appraised of the resource load placed upon the CPU of the terminal by way of the GUI-displayed graphical representation of gauge **1305**, the terminal user instructs the duplication manager stored in main memory **1302** to perform load-balancing between the respective CPUs of

user terminals illustrated by main memories **1301**, **1302** and **1303**.

Upon comparing resource load tolerances, said duplication manager in main memory **1302** has ascertained that the CPU of the terminal corresponding to main memory **1301** is best suited for the switching of the locally-stored artificial intelligence object to the state of duplicate master, with regard to its respective resource load tolerance gauge **1304** indicating only ten percent of CPU-usage level.

Figure 14 graphically illustrates the result of the load balancing task performed by said duplication manager resident in main memory **1302**. The state of duplicate **1201**, i.e. artificial intelligence object **1201**, has been switched to the state of duplicate master **1201**. The interactions between duplicate master **1201** and duplicates **1202** and **1203** take place in an identical fashion as the interactions which were taking place between duplicate master **1202** and duplicates **1201** and **1203** prior to the state switching. The resource load tolerance gauges **1304**, **1305** and **1306** now illustrates a CPU-usage level of approximately fifty percent respectively. Thus, a load balancing operation has been performed, which preserves the performance and integrity of the applications both locally and remotely.

Claims

1. A method of sharing data over a network in which said network includes a plurality of network-connected terminals and

5 each of said terminals has memory means and processing means, wherein said memory means stores duplication manager instructions for managing object duplication, comprising the steps of:

responding to a data requirement of a first of said terminals by duplicating an object from a second of said terminals at said first terminal;

10 accessing data in said duplicated object using locally executed object instructions at said first terminal; and

maintaining data consistency between duplicated objects by establishing a duplication master, wherein the role of said duplicate master is switchable between said duplicates.

15 2. A method according to claim 1, wherein duplicate master switching is performed to effect load balancing over the network.

3. A method according to claim 1, wherein duplicate master switching is performed as the result of a fault recovery process.

20

4. A method according to any of claims 1 to 3, wherein duplicates are updated by said duplicate master.

25 5. A method according to any of claims 1 to 4, wherein only one duplicate master exists for a group of duplicates.

6. Data network apparatus having a plurality of terminals each with memory means and processing means in which duplication manager instructions for managing object duplication are stored in said memory means, comprising

5 data requirement response means for responding to a data requirement of a first terminal by duplicating an object from a second terminal to said first terminal;

data access means for accessing data in said duplicated object using locally executed object instructions at said first terminal;

10 a duplication master established at one of said terminals to maintain data consistency; and

switching means for switching the role of said duplication master between said duplicates.

15 7. Apparatus according to claim 6, including load balance detecting means wherein duplicate master switching is performed to effect load balancing over the network.

20 8. Apparatus according to claim 6, including fault recovery means, wherein duplicate master switching is performed as the result of a fault recovery process generated by said fault recovery means.

25 9. Apparatus according to any of claims 6 to 8, wherein said duplicate master includes duplicate updating means for updating said duplicates.

10. Apparatus according to any of claims 6 to 9, including means for ensuring that only one duplicate master exists for a group of duplicates.

5 11. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions executable by a computer configured as a network terminal, such that when executing said instructions said network terminal will perform the steps of

responding to a data requirement by duplicating an object from a second terminal;

10 accessing data in said duplicated object using locally executed object instructions; and

maintaining data consistency between duplicated objects by responding to a duplication master or by being configured as said duplication master, including procedures facilitating the switching of said duplication master between duplicates that have network access.

12. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions according to claim 11, such that a computer will facilitate duplication master switching to effect load balancing over the network.

20

13. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions according to claim 11, such that said computer will facilitate duplication master switching as the result of a fault recovery process.

25

14. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions according to any of claims 11 to 13, wherein said computer is configured to facilitate the updating of duplicates by said duplicate master.

15. A computer-readable medium according to any of claims 11 to 14, such that a computer will be configured to allow only one duplicate master for a group of duplicates communicating over said network.

5 **16.** A method of sharing data over a network substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.



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